NSA Was Not Merely a CIA Front

Revelations of the covert sponsorship of the National Student Association by the CIA give a lopsided picture of the student group.

"For God's sake," said one of the NSA leaders yesterday, "everybody thinks this organization has been nothing more than a front for the CIA and most of us didn't know a thing about the CIA."

While the international wing of the student organization was influenced by the CIA, the NSA functions primarily as a service organization for its members on 300 American campuses.

More than half the current NSA annual budget of $825,000 supports domestic activities ranging from civil rights to conferences on student government.

In an organization that touched hundreds of thousands of students, only a small minority of the national officers knew anything about its link to CIA.

Most of the students associated with NSA had little or nothing to do with its international operations, although the group sponsored student tours, arranged international conferences and helped students get summer jobs abroad. Apparently, a small but influential group did serve CIA purposes here and abroad, however.

American students were more commonly involved in activities that focused on the problems on their own campuses. In the last year, the NSA has sponsored more than 50 domestic conferences for student leaders.

They ranged from explorations of why student suicides were rising to methods of improving the operation of student governments. Gaining a stronger student voice in university policy-making and the evaluation of courses and teachers has been a topic of major interest at several conferences.

The NSA has also been active in civil rights activities and has a grant from the U.S. Office of Economic Opportunity to coordinate and improve programs in which college students tutor slum youngsters.

Besides its CIA funds, the NSA has been suported by grants from the Ford, Rockefeller, Danforth and Marshall foundations.

A pamphlet published by the NSA reports that it was founded in 1947 by "young veterans (who) saw the need for an American student organization to foster intercampus cooperation nationally and to represent the U.S. in the international student world."